

## USDA Project Spearheads Cultural and Entertainment Complex

When small towns lose one of the fixtures that define them, like their school, grocery store, or a keystone employer, it can be difficult for the residents. Such was the case when Central City closed their 99 year old decaying and non-compliant state theater. Merrick County Entertainment Corporation was looking to the future when the theater closed. They planned for a new state of the art theater as part of a planned cultural and entertainment complex situated on the trailhead of an inter-county trail system.

The City of Central City's Electric Utility wished to be involved in the project and to also be able to contribute to future economic development. The city applied for and received a \$300,000 grant from USDA Rural Development and added a match of \$60,000 (20% match). The city's electric utility then provided a no interest loan of \$360,000 for 10 years to the Merrick County Entertainment Corporation to purchase equipment for the Widman Cinema. On April 14, 2017, the theater opened to the community.



*The new Central City Theater opened April 14, 2017*

The Widman Cinema is a modern two screen theater with a total of 290 seats, state of the art equipment, a complete concessions area, and wheelchair accessible spaces. The parking lot will serve multiple uses as parking for the theater, linear park area, trail-head, and entertainment complex. The theater will also be available to private persons, businesses, and non-profit organizations for community and familial gatherings. The theater is projected to create four full time jobs.

As the Merrick County Entertainment Corporation pays back the loan, the City of Central City's Electric Utility will keep the funds in a revolving loan fund. The revolving loan fund will be leveraged with the city's existing economic development funds to continue to grow investment and jobs in the community.

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**Obligation Amount:** \$300,000 REDG

**Date of Obligation:** 9/04/2015

**Congressional District:** Congressman Smith, District 03; Senators Fischer and Sasse

**Partners:** \$60,000 match City of Central City, \$940,000 in donations and other grants to Merrick County Entertainment Corporation.

**Demographics:** Central City's population is 2,934, with a median household income of \$38,705.

**Impact:** The Widman Cinema will create four new jobs in a community of 2,934. The impact of the revolving loan fund program will help grow the rural community.

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